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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, women have entered academe in unprecedented numbers. Even so, women remain disproportionately underrepresented in the ranks of tenured faculty members. What are viewed as the major causes of this inequity--the tenure system's inadequacies, the tenure crunch of recent decades along with the related increase in hiring of adjunct faculty, and the persistence of sex discrimination in allocation of resources and evaluation of work--are discussed in this policy brief. In spite of the factors working against women in academe, it is likely that the 1990s will present a window of opportunity for women faculty as a large number of their colleagues are expected to retire and the number of doctorates awarded declines. Sixteen strategies to take advantage of the predicted easing of the tenure crunch are offered. (DB)

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Women and Tenure: The Opportunity of a Century

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION

OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN

December 1989

Women and Tenure: The Opportunity of a Century

During the past two decades, women have entered academe in unprecedented numbers. In the 1964–65 academic year, only 38 percent of college students were female and only 10.8 percent of doctorates were awarded to women. By 1986, more than half—52 percent—of college students were female and 35.4 percent of doctorates were awarded to women.[1] For 1967–72 inclusive, 16.7 percent of new faculty members were female; for 1975–80, this figure increased to 24.5 percent.[2]

Even so, women remain disproportionately underrepresented in the tenured ranks of academe. In 1988–89, only 49 percent of female faculty held tenure, compared to 71 percent of male faculty.[3] While the number of women receiving doctorates who planned to enter academe grew by 66 percent in the seventies, the number of female associate professors (the rank which usually signifies the achievement of tenure) increased by only 19 percent in the eighties.[4] In 1988–89, women's average salaries were still lower than men's at every rank—professor, associate professor, assistant professor, and instructor—and women with tenure were concentrated in the lower ranks.[5] Though minority women's share of faculty slots grew slightly during the eighties, their chances for achieving tenure seemed to be lower than average.[6] The lowest progression, retention, and tenure rates in academe are found among black faculty, with black women faculty concentrated in the lower academic ranks.[7]

Differences in the seniority of male and female faculty account only in part for these inequities. The major cause is a confluence of factors—the tenure system's inadequacies, the tenure crunch of recent decades and the related increase in hiring of adjunct faculty, and the persistence of sex discrimination in allocation of resources and evaluation of work—that have combined to deny women an equal role in academe. In the nineties, however, there will be a window of opportunity for women faculty as their colleagues hired in the fifties and sixties begin to retire and the number of doctorates awarded declines.[8]

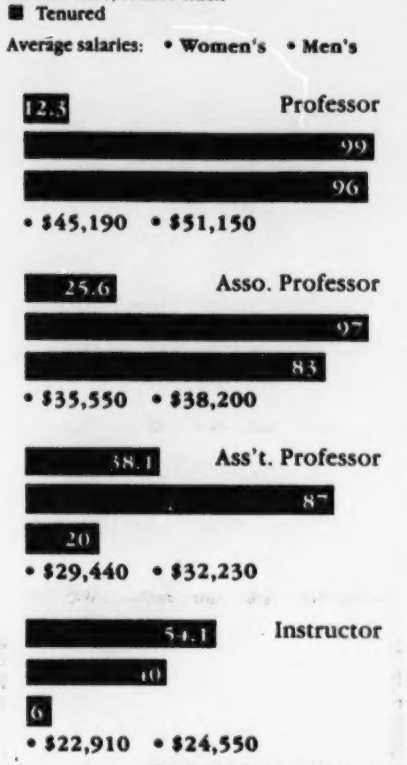
Since its inception in 1881, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) has worked in a variety of ways to increase women's presence on college and university faculties. Early on, AAUW considered the number of tenured women faculty an important criterion in granting membership status to colleges and universities. Today, through the Association's College/University Relations Program, members nationwide work with 650 member institutions for equity for women in all aspects of campus life. The AAUW Educational Foundation has helped women scholars achieve tenure by funding their research with dissertation and postdoctoral fellowships; more than 5,000 such fellowships have been awarded since 1888. The Foundation's annual Recognition Award for a Young Scholar, which carries a cash prize, often honors an untenured woman scholar. And in 1981, AAUW established its Legal Advocacy Fund to support women—primarily scholars and faculty—seeking judicial redress for sex discrimination in higher education.

This brief builds on AAUW's tradition of academic activism by outlining the major obstacles to women faculty seeking tenure. A product of dialogues that AAUW has begun with women's research institutes, the Foundation's fellowships panels, and others in the education community, this brief also sets forth strategies for women faculty, their institutions, and AAUW advocates to make the most of the tenure opportunities that will be presented in the next decade.

TENURE REVIEW: NATURAL SELECTIONS?

Tenure is a guarantee of job security bestowed upon faculty by their peers after a probationary period—typically seven years—and a rigorous review. The process of peer review for tenure decisions was created by the American Association of University Professors in 1915, after a nationally notorious case in which a faculty member was dismissed because his research offended a major donor to his institution.[9] Peer review is meant to ensure that

WHERE ARE WOMEN FACULTY?



Sources: American Association of University Professors, "Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 1988–89," in *Academe* 75 (July–August 1989), tables 4, 9, and 10, with * calculated from information in Table 14.

Jean Wiesbrough

a scholar's work is judged only by fellow scholars in her or his field and only on its intellectual merits to guarantee academic freedom.

But the tenure review process is not without flaws—flaws that affect the futures of male as well as female scholars. Its most notable shortcoming is a lack of accountability. Few higher education institutions allow faculty access to their tenure portfolios, and even fewer open tenure committee deliberations—during which prejudices and biases are more likely to surface than in written evaluations—to the candidate. Candidates rarely are given an opportunity to rebut false or misleading information that may have been placed in their confidential files, or are informed of the basis for a negative decision.

Critics of the tenure review process also assert that research is both overemphasized (in comparison to teaching and service) and evaluated badly. Untenured faculty members are commonly advised to deemphasize teaching preparation and divert their energies to churning out articles because tenure review committees weigh research productivity more heavily. And, too often, such productivity is measured quantitatively—by the number of books and articles published—rather than qualitatively. This favors scholars who complete many brief projects over those who work on long-term projects, even when the latter's work may be more intellectually ambitious or significant.

Finally, it is becoming harder for tenure review committees to provide true "peer" reviews of candidates' work. As scholarship has become simultaneously more interdisciplinary and more specialized, it has become less likely that a department's faculty will be sufficiently conversant with a candidate's subject to provide an adequate review. This problem is especially acute for scholars in women's studies and ethnic studies (many of whom are minority women), whose research is undervalued by faculty with more traditional training. At many universities, faculty recommendations are subject to the veto of administrators from entirely different fields, who conduct their own review. More and more, scholars are being evaluated for tenure by people who are unlikely to understand their work.

THE TENURE CRUNCH

For the past 20 years, there have been far fewer tenure slots than applicants. Due in part to overexpansion in the fifties and early sixties, many departments are now top-heavy with tenured faculty, mostly white men. At the same time, while baby-boomers have been entering academe in record numbers, baby-bust enrollments have been shrinking and shifting among disciplines. The resulting fiscal uncertainties have made administrators reluctant to open up new tenure-track positions.[10]

Universities have responded to the tenure crunch by hiring more adjunct faculty—part-timers and non-tenure-track faculty hired for specific periods or indefinitely renewable but unguaranteed contracts—and by raising the standards for tenure. Tenure candidates are now routinely turned down by tenured faculty with less publishing experience than they. An informal survey of former AAUW Educational Foundation Fellows confirmed that women tenured more than 20 years ago achieved tenure more easily than recently hired scholars.[11] There has also been increasing use of "effectively terminal" tenure-track appointments—jobs that are labeled tenure-track but are kept open by denying tenure to successive applicants after they serve their seven or more years of probation.[12]

Women, particularly minority women, have been disproportionately affected by the tenure crunch. In addition to the usual strikes against them in the tenure review process—the tendency of predominantly white male review committees to replicate the social and ethnic make-up of their departments as they hire, the demands on women to balance work and family, and various forms of sexism (see "Peer Pressures & Trade Secrets" below)—the crunch hit just as women scholars began to enter academe in numbers comparable to their male counterparts.

"Even in this small women's college the [tenure committee] gives first rank to research and only a secondary rank to teaching . . . and 90 percent of my time now is devoted to teaching, advising, and curriculum development."[27]

"The arrival of my youngest child was seen as 'unprofessional behavior.' "[28]

THE GRAPES OF MATH (& HISTORY & SOCIOLOGY & ECONOMICS & . . .)

Colleges have always employed adjunct faculty. They provide both financial savings (they draw lower salaries and no fringe benefits) and flexibility in the curriculum. But the use of adjunct faculty has increased precipitously in recent years: the percentage of part-time college faculty nearly doubled between 1966 and 1980, and 60 percent of new appointments in the core humanities in 1982–83 were non-tenure-track.[13] Moreover, the role of adjunct faculty has changed to the extent that its ranks resemble a pool of migrant labor.

Many institutions, for example, repeatedly hire the same part-time instructors to teach regular courses, but insist on making appointments for a semester only, often at the last minute. Faculty in non-tenure-track positions typically teach heavier loads at lower salaries than regular faculty. They have little access to the resources of the university for professional development and research. They suffer from a decided lack of community and collegiality with their fellow faculty. And if they do win appointment to a tenure-track position, their years as adjunct faculty typically do not count toward tenure.

This has created a class of "gypsy scholars" that is disproportionately female. In 1986, although women faculty held only 25 percent of full-time positions, they held 45 percent of such positions that were non-tenure-track.[14]

PEER PRESSURES & TRADE SECRETS

The tenure system's flaws have a greater impact on women because they are exacerbated by pervasive sex discrimination in academe.

- Female graduate students receive less financial support than male graduate students and are more likely to be given a teaching assistantship (TA) than a research

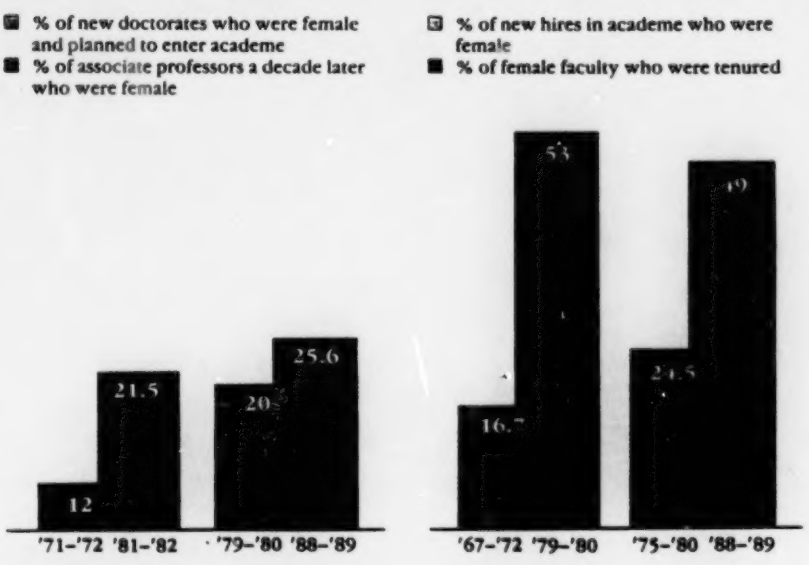
assistantship (RA) or fellowship. In math, for instance, men are five times as likely to receive fellowships as women.[15] Because RAs can often apply some of their research to their thesis topic and get to work directly with faculty, instead of being isolated in a classroom, they typically complete their dissertations faster than TAs and have greater opportunities to network and develop professional contacts.

- The hiring rate for women has increased, but they are typically hired at lower ranks and are not promoted at the same rate. Studies of hiring decisions have shown that department chairs confronted with identical vitae recommend a higher rank for those with men's names at the top.[16]
- Women are more often hired for joint appointments in two departments; trying to meet the conflicting demands of two disciplines often means that neither discipline is satisfied when tenure review rolls around.[17] Research that is necessary for tenure in one department, for instance, may be considered trivial by another.
- Once hired, women are often assigned heavier teaching loads and more introductory courses; at tenure time, research and graduate teaching are more highly valued.[18] Women also tend to use more participatory classroom teaching techniques, which are often evaluated by male faculty as lacking rigor and by students of both sexes, who have been socialized to devalue nurturant behavior, as weak.[19]

"[I was kept from getting tenure by] the pursuit of topics that were not mainstream at the time (gender and ethnicity with special focus on Puerto Ricans). I was not willing to . . . keep two sets of research, one of which is 'acceptable.' "[29]

- Discrimination is probably most pervasive with respect to the elusive issue of "collegiality"—styles of working and interpersonal communication. Again, participatory and collaborative leadership styles, more common to women, are often seen as a weakness. Women are often excluded and isolated from the inner workings of their departments; for instance, they are less likely than men to be briefed beforehand about a faculty meeting.[20]
- Women scholars' research is typically downgraded. Numerous studies have shown that articles attributed to women are given lower "grades" than identical articles attributed to men.[21] Research on women's issues and in interdisciplinary areas such as women's studies and ethnic studies are often especially discounted during tenure review; minority women, who tend to participate more in both of these areas, are doubly disadvantaged.[22] Further, when evaluating research productivity, tenure committees tend not to adjust for women's lesser access to facilities and funding.[23]

PROMOTION & TENURE FOR WOMEN FACULTY



Sources: Calculated from Mariam K. Chamberlain, ed., *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988), tables 11.1, 11.3, and 11.4, and p. 263, and American Association of University Professors, "Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 1988–89," in *Academe* 75 (July–August 1989), tables 9 and 14.

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- Women's institutional and community service is often evaluated differently than men's. Although women—particularly minority women—are besieged with offers to serve on faculty committees, their service often goes unrewarded. Paradoxically, while men may be respected for turning down committee assignments (to protect their research time), women are resented for doing the same.[24] While women scholars' service to women's groups or the campus women's center is often downgraded as "political," men scholars' work with groups like the Jaycees or Rotary is seen as valuable.[25] Again, this is doubly true with respect to minority women's work with minority community groups.

THE BALANCING ACT

When most of the tenured faculty in this country—men—were preparing for tenure review, the majority relied on the services of full-time homemakers (usually their wives) to allow them to concentrate solely on the research necessary to gain tenure. Few women have access to such services. Dual-career faculty couples are caught in a particularly vicious cycle: time away from family responsibilities for one means less research time for the other.

Both men and women need time for family responsibilities as well as a career. But for women scholars, who typically begin their probationary seven years for tenure review in their early thirties—when their doctors begin advising them not to postpone childbearing much longer—the dilemma is excruciating. In an era of inadequate child care services, having a child necessarily eliminates much of the precious time needed for research. Women who are struggling to raise young children during their probationary period clearly are at a disadvantage in the tenure competition.

STRATEGIES FOR THE NINETIES

The predicted easing of the tenure crunch in the nineties provides an opportunity for women to become equal partners in academe. But for this to happen, women faculty must cater to the tenure system's basic requirements—significant research and peer support—while working for a less discriminatory and more humane tenure system for all faculty. AAUW advocates the following strategies for women faculty:

- Develop a ten-year career plan including research *and* networking. Doing good work is not enough; an excellent research portfolio must be supplemented by faculty allies for the tenure review process.
- Make research a top priority. Vigorously seek facilities and funding such as AAUW Educational Foundation American Fellowships for dissertation and postdoctoral research. For application information, please contact the AAUW Educational Foundation, 2401 Virginia Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20037; 202/728-7603.
- Work with other faculty women on your campus. At Arizona State University, for example, the Faculty Women's Association reviews tenure decisions on women faculty and meets with the administration to discuss them.
- Join the women's caucus of your disci-

"In the first years I noticed that there was little or no respect for any view I might voice at a department meeting unless a man should happen to restate the view I had just expressed. Then the idea was found worthy of attention."[30]

pline's professional organization.

- Join women's groups such as AAUW that provide expertise and support from outside academe.

Even if women scholars do all of the above, some structural changes will be necessary if they are to make substantial inroads in higher education in the 1990s. AAUW advocates the following strategies for higher education administrators and senior faculty:

- Strengthen the tenure review process by creating institutionwide—vs. departmental—criteria for tenure, providing a true peer review of research (using faculty from outside the department or institution if necessary), emphasizing quality of research more than quantity, and recognizing the value of teaching and the time it diverts from research.
- Evaluate research that uses interdisciplinary approaches and examines nontraditional topics on a par with more conventional work.
- Help junior scholars of both sexes to obtain adequate funding and facilities for their research.
- Increase accountability by presenting reasons for tenure denial in writing and, if not already established, creating an appeals process for faculty denied tenure. Conduct exit interviews with terminated faculty.
- Explore options for making the tenure system more flexible, such as stopping the tenure clock for a year for the birth or adoption of a child and medical and family emergencies, offering tenure to regular part-time faculty, and creating shared appointments (between semi-retired and junior faculty, for instance).

The window of opportunity for women faculty in the 1990s makes it more important than ever for AAUW to participate in debates about the tenure system and in the struggles of individual women scholars to gain tenure. AAUW advocates the following strategies for its branches, divisions, and individual members:

- Work with women's caucuses on your local campus on issues related to tenure, such as affordable, quality child care and the acceptance of women's studies.
- Collect data about the gender distribution of tenure-track and non-tenure-track slots on your local campus, and write letters to or schedule a meeting with administration officials to voice your concerns and explore solutions.
- Establish a support group for women on campus by linking women faculty with AAUW members and others in the community. One AAUW branch recently supported one of its member's bids for tenure at a nearby campus by writing to the chancellor about her qualifications as a researcher, teacher, and role model as a minority professional and a woman working in a scientific field. When the member received tenure, she was told that it was due, in part, to consideration of the points raised in the branch's letter.[26]
- Offer women faculty opportunities for community service. Use their expertise on issues such as preparing girls for college and encouraging girls to study math and science, or enlist them in identifying potential research topics for the AAUW Educational Foundation's Eleanor Roosevelt Fund for Women and Girls. For further information about the Fund, please contact the Foundation, address and phone above.
- Support the AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund (LAF), which continues to help women who are litigating tenure and promotion decisions. Queries for further information about or contributions to the LAF should be directed to the AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund, address above; 202/785-7761.
- Encourage your local colleges and universities to join AAUW. For further information, please contact the AAUW College/University Relations Program, address above; 202/785-7759.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

More than a century ago, AAUW led the movement of women into academe—a movement that has seen college degrees for women become pervasive, graduate degrees for women become a commonplace, and tenure for women become a reality. In the next decade, women faculty will have the opportunity to become full partners in this country's higher educational enterprise by gaining tenure in unprecedented numbers. By intensifying its informed advocacy on behalf of women faculty, AAUW can lead this movement to its finish line—a higher educational system enriched by the perspectives and talents of all of its scholars.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Digest of Education Statistics, 1988* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 1988), p. 142, Table 117; Mariam K. Chamberlain, ed., *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988), Table 11.1, pp. 256–257.
2. Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 265.
3. American Association of University Professors (AAUP), "Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 1988–89," *Academe* 75 (March–April 1989), Table 9, p. 15.
4. Calculated on the basis of Chamberlain, op. cit., tables 11.1 and 11.3, pp. 257 & 260; and AAUP, op. cit., Table 14, p. 19.
5. AAUP, op. cit., tables 4 and 9, pp. 11 & 15; Chamberlain, op. cit., pp. 258–9.
6. Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 57.
7. Yolanda T. Moses, *Black Women in Academe: Issues and Strategies* (Washington, DC: Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges, August 1989), p. 13.
8. Carolyn J. Mooney, "Uncertainty is Rampant as Colleges Begin to Brace for Faculty Shortage Expected to Begin in 1990s," *Chronicle of Higher Education* January 25, 1989, p. A-14.
9. Commission on Academic Tenure in Higher Education, *Faculty Tenure: A Report and Recommendations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1973), pp. 140–148.
10. Mooney, op. cit., p. A-16.
11. AAUW Educational Foundation, unpublished report (survey of 545 former graduate fellows), July 1989, conducted by Program Officer Avis Davis.
12. Martin Finkelstein, "Life on the 'Effectively Terminal' Tenure Track," *Academe* 72 (January–February 1986), pp. 52–56.
13. Lillian Robbins and Ethel D. Kahn, "Sex Discrimination and Sex Equity for Faculty Women in the 1980s," *Journal of Social Issues* 41.4 (1985), p. 5; AAUP, "1986 Report on Full-time Non-Tenure Track Appointments," *Academe* 72 (July–August 1986), p. 15a.
14. AAUP, ibid, p. 14a.
15. Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 212.
16. L.S. Fidell, "Empirical Verification of Sex Discrimination in Hiring Practices in Psychology," in R.K. Unger and F.L. Denmark, eds., *Woman: Dependent or Independent Variable* (New York: Psychological Dimensions, 1975), pp. 775–777.
17. Robert J. Menges and William H. Exum, "Barriers to the Advancement of Women and Minority Faculty," *Journal of Higher Education* 54.2 (March–April 1983), p. 133.
18. Ibid, p. 132.
19. Bernice R. Sandler and Roberta M. Hall, *The Campus Climate Revisited: Chilly for Women Faculty, Administrators, and Graduate Students*, (Washington, DC: Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges, October 1986), p. 15.
20. Ibid, pp. 7–8, 11–12.
21. Philip Goldberg, "Are Women Prejudiced Against Women?" *Trans Action* 5 (April 1968), pp. 28–30; Michele A. Paludi and Lisa A. Strayer, "What's in an Author's Name? Differential Evaluations of Performance as a Function of Author's Name," *Sex Roles* 12 (1985), pp. 353–361.
22. Sandler and Hall, op. cit., p. 7.
23. Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 218.
24. Sandler and Hall, op. cit., p. 4.
25. AAUP, "Valuing and Devaluing Women's Studies," *Academe* 75 (July–August 1989), pp. 37–38.
26. American Association of University Women, "The Branch-Campus Connection," *Leader in Action* 10.1 (Fall 1989), pp. 12–13.
27. AAUW Educational Foundation, unpublished survey (of 75 women faculty), March–June 1989.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Athena Theodore, *The Campus Troublemakers: Academic Women in Protest* (Houston: Cap and Gown Press, 1986), p. 19.

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AAUW promotes equity for women, education and self-development over the life span, and positive societal change.

The **AAUW Educational Foundation** provides funds to advance education, research, and self-development for women and to foster equity and positive societal change.

The **AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund** provides funding and a support system for women seeking judicial redress for sex discrimination.

Sharon Schuster, President, AAUW

Alice McKee, President, AAUW Educational Foundation

Gretchen Ilgenfritz, President, AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund

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